

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget – Greve editor

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The Story of a Life

A young girl, the daughter of the missionary in a western territory was sent to the east to be educated in a school under the auspices of the church to which her parents belonged. As her parents were very poor, the church undertook the education of the girl with the understanding that after she had completed her education, she was to devote her life to missionary work; the field of her labor to be selected by the church. Her education was to be directed entirely by the church, as was her subsequent life. The church was to have entire charge over her in all matters, even reserving the power of regulating her friendships and acquaintances. In short she was adopted in precisely the same way that any child can be adopted, and bore the same relation to the church that the child would bear to its adopted parents. She was expected to give up her own parents in so far as her relations with them might affect her future calling. Of course she corresponded with them, and kept up the acquaintance by visiting, at long intervals, but the relations of parent and child were entirely given up.

These arrangements were made between the parents and the church while the girl was still quite young, and before she could have any knowledge of the life laid out for her, or of the life that she must give up. The early part of her life having been passed in the comparative wilderness of the west had given her no indication of the real life that most girls have too look forward to. She had no conception of any other occupation than that of missionary, as she had been limited in her acquaintance to her own family, and a few families of the post-traders.

She came east to the school, an ordinary church academy situated in one of the inland towns of an older state. At first she was well contented with the change. She was quite young. She met a number of girls of her own age, she was treated kindly, and very naturally gave no thought to the future. That there must, in time, come an end to this pleasant life, was a thought that never occurred to her. That the future lives of the girls with whom she was thrown would be far different from her own, did not trouble her, if she thought of it at all. Gradually, as she grew older, and became better

acquainted with the situation, she began to realize her position, a position of bitter dependence with no prospect of change. As the years passed by, and vacations came and went, from which her friends returned with glowing descriptions of the happy homes they had left, and the pleasant times they had had, she began to feel that she had no home and that these pleasant times were not for her. While school was in session she did not think much of her situation, but these constantly recurring interruptions, so many bright spots in the school girl's life, were the hardest part of her life to bear. Still her teachers were kind to her, particularly so when all the other scholars left her alone with them, often planning little diversions for her, and gradually, as she grew older, endeavoring to encourage her, and aroused in her a sense of the to them glowing possibilities of her future. But the constant feeling in the minds of the teachers themselves, that, however sincerely tried to be, they felt the ghastliness of her future, could not but have its influence on the girl. Their kindest speeches began to strike her as intended to conceal something unpleasant, very much as sugar disguises a disagreeable medicine. But these thoughts only came up at intervals, leaving her for the most part in a comparatively contented frame of mind. Had no outside influence been brought to bear, it is probable that in time she could have conquered all rebellious thoughts, and gone to her destined vocation with but little regret, solacing herself with generalities in regard to the good she might do in the race.

But these outside influences did arise, and in the most natural fashion in the world. Some of her girl friends naturally enough, had acquaintances in the town where the school was situated, and among these acquaintances there were of course young men of about the same age. According to the rules of the Academy, calling upon the young girls was permitted to a limited extent. But it was natural that she should finally become acquainted with some of the young men, and that she should, in the course of time, come to have her preferences. Her opportunities for meeting these young men were numerous on account of the connection of the institution with the church, and also on account of her long stays in the place in summer-time, when all rules were relaxed. The frequent meetings at church, at church sociables, at commencement exercises, and during the summer but helped in strengthening the bonds of friendship already formed with a number of the young fellows of the town.

One in particular gained her goodwill. His opportunities for meeting the young missionary were very frequent because of his being a favorite with

the superintendent, as well as a relative. The natural result followed. The two fell in love, and then, for the first time in her life, the girl awoke to the realities of her position. Then she saw, when it was too late, that love was an impossible luxury to her; that she had no right to have feelings; she saw that what was the privilege of the poorest was denied to her; that she, although not wedded to the church was under such obligations to it that union between her and her lover was impossible. She fully saw the iniquity of the bargain that had disposed of the possibility of happiness for her, but felt that she was by her conscience bound to observe the conditions of that bargain. She felt that although not a party to the contract, that it had for her sake, he and that therefore she was bound by it.

All this she told to her lover. She assured him of her love for him, but insisted upon the impossibility of their union. He of course argued the matter with her, feeling sure that her love would prevail over her sense of duty. His argument failing, he resorted to different means. Indignantly declaring that she did not love him, he left her, thinking that his absence would accomplish what he had failed in accomplishing by his presence. After a short time, he saw that she, although much hurt, was not changed. She calmly accepted the situation, telling him that he misjudged her, but that their separation, was therefore all the more necessary. He, of course, became penitent, and relaxing implored her to change her decision, using all the arguments in this power, telling her that two lives were involved, and asking if it were right that they two should be made miserable all their lives for a wretched and unholy bargain made before she was of sufficient age to realize what was going on. She persisted in her refusal, but did not dismiss him, feeling that there was no wrong in their affection for each other, if it did not interfere with her duty. She seemed content to live on in the same way, regardless of the future, till her education should be completed, and the time should come for her to accept the burden; – it was now a burden, which had been laid upon her. He, on the contrary could not bear this state of bitter-sweet, and thought only of the future, and the time that would end their period of happiness. That time came soon enough. The day and night of her graduation came around, and after it a reception. At this her parents were present, feeling that however poor they might be, they must see their daughter graduate. They believed that they had done the best that could be done for her, and that therefore she must of course be happy. Others were present, members and authorities of the local branch of the church, who were somewhat better acquainted with the state of affairs, although they had not realized the extent to which matters had been carried.

After the public ceremonies of the evening were over, and the reception or social was in progress, it was suddenly discovered that the two were missing. She, a great favorite, and the most prominent member of the graduating class, was missed very soon, and it was not long before his absence was noticed, and the two circumstances put together, left but one explanation possible, that they had gone together. In truth, they had. He, feeling that this was his last opportunity, as she left in the morning for a visit to her parents preparatory to leaving for the scene of her labor, had prevailed on her to take a drive with him. He felt that he must use one more effort to conquer her determination. She, full of love for him, and with a heart bleeding at the thought of the separation so soon to come felt that she could not deny herself one evening more of happiness with him, regardless of any comment she might excite. The ride lasted for several hours, during which he begged, implored, and prayed her to alter her determination, but with no success. She wept with him, covered him with kisses and embraces, but remained firm to what she thought her duty. At last he gave up his attempts, convinced that they were fruitless, and turned his horses homeward, a crushed and hopeless man, full of bitterness with the world, and with the girl who was more than all the world to him.

When they arrived at the Academy the hour was late and all except the more immediate friends had long since departed for home full of curiosity and speculation concerning their whereabouts. Her parents, who had been almost crushed with grief and anxiety, loaded them with reproaches when they came in. This was too much for the lover to bear. He felt that these people, her parents, and the church authorities, had ruined the lives of himself and the girl he loved. To be reproached by them was more than he could stand. He turned upon them bitterly accusing them, after stating the case to them in its entirety. He did not fail to do justice to the love that each had for the other, or to the overwrought sense of honor that kept them apart. The scene which followed was very painful, particularly to the parents, who could not appreciate the position, feeling that they had done best for their child, and not understanding by what right a stranger could reproach them. The father ordered the lover from the house; an order that did not prevent a tender farewell before the eyes of the parents and the few that remained.

The next day she left. He wished to follow her, but she forbade it. After a short visit with her parents she entered upon the field of her duties in a western Territory; the Indians were her pupils, and a few rough soldiers and

their families her only companions. In the meantime the lover went about his daily work, a hopeless man. Life seemed to have no further charm for him. His constitution, naturally weak, required the most constant care, but this he failed to give. He exposed himself recklessly time and time again, until the seeds of consumption were sown. Even then a strong determination to life would have saved him, but this he had not. His mind was full of bitterness toward all, or nearly all of his fellow townsmen and fellow church members, whom he held partly responsible for the state of affairs. He knew that it had been their arguments that had decided the girl he loved while she was yet wavering between him and what she afterwards concluded to be her duty. This caused him to give up all society, and even his church. He saw no good in an institution which could countenance such wrong. This seclusion, together with his morbid feelings told heavily upon his health. His consumption soon became confirmed, and it was not long until it was apparent that he must die. Then he wrote to her, telling her that he must see her once again before all was over. His time on earth was short, he said, and there could be no objection to his coming to see her.

In the meantime she had been appointed to a mission in South America, and had been told to start at once, to remain at least five years. This mission she had accepted thankfully, feeling the burden of being in the same land and yet so far away from her lover, too severe. The news of his failing health decided her to visit for a short time before departure, the scene of her school days. She was there but a day, but that day was long remembered by her as her lover walked into the room, pale with weakness and disease, she broke down. The sight of the man she loved, in such a condition, overcame her. The feeling that his poor health was particularly the result of her action, was very painful to her. She covered him with caresses which although barely he was strong enough to stand, he returned in the most passionate manner. They remained together undisturbed, for some hours. Finally he left her, never to see her again. He had not tried to persuade her to give up her mission this time. His health, he knew, would be an insurmountable obstacle to their union, and therefore he pressed it no more. He felt that now he must give her up. The next day she left for the scene of her life-work. She arrived at her post of duty in good season, and soon became permanently installed in her position. They had agreed to correspond, feeling that it could not be for much longer, but the mails were infrequent, and so unreliable that she did not hear for months. At last a number of letters came together. Among them was one enclosed in an envelope edged with black. This, with fearful apprehensions she opened first, and in it read the news of his death. The

blow was too severe to allow her to read further, for some time. When she had recovered her self she read the particulars, how he had loved her to the last, calling upon her with his last breath. Some days later she took up the letters from him, and read them in their order. They all told the same story of love for her, of despair of life and happiness. After she had read and reread them all she laid them aside, and with a firm mind turned to the work that lay before her. This she did faithfully trying to divert her mind from what had happened. When her five years had expired, she had her time renewed and staid on working day after day, and month after month, just as before.

In time the minister resident at the mission, a young man with good abilities and strong faith in his work became interested in her and asked her to marry him. She did not love him, and told him so. Her love had died forever, and was buried too deep for resurrection. All that she had left of it was the small package of letters tied with a black ribbon. Still the match was a desirable one for many reasons. Both were devoted to the work before them and expected to remain in it. The church saw the desirability of the union, and urged it. So she told the minister her story, how she had loved and lost and the impossibility of her loving again. She read him all the letters and told him that her happiness was forever gone and then – she accepted him.

They have been married some years, and are still in South America. She has made a faithful wife, and he a loving husband, but her love lies buried with her lover in a distant northern grave.

Charles Theodore Greve